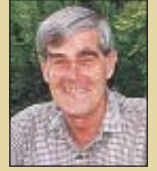




BRUCE PYKE, CRDC

COTTON COTTON COTTON RESEARCH ROUNDUP



RALPH SCHULZE, CRDC

Two areas of CRDC research are currently under the spotlight — BMP and biotechnology.

BMP EVALUATION

The cotton industry's BMP program was introduced in 1997 to help the industry address the major environmental issue of the time — pesticide contamination of rivers. Since then, BMP and its continued development as an environmental management program have given the cotton industry environmental credibility in many quarters. In 1998, BMP provided the industry with a strong non-regulatory platform to deal with the crisis of endosulfan contamination of cattle.

Endosulfan contamination of rivers and livestock in cotton areas has declined to very low levels since 1998, while there has been a steady increase in the number of farms voluntarily audited under the BMP program. It would be easy to assume there is a direct link between broad-scale envi-

ronmental improvements and BMP, but CRDC believed it was time to evaluate formally the contribution BMP has made to these gains.

As part of a project funded by the Australian Government through Cotton Australia and the CRDC, Macarthur Agribusiness was commissioned to conduct the first detailed evaluation of BMP since its inception. Their report, to be delivered in December 2003, will provide a valuable benchmark for answering questions such as:

- How much do targeted environment management programs like BMP contribute to the achievement of real environmental outcomes and management change on farm?
- If voluntary programs like BMP do contribute to these outcomes, what kind of evidence or incentives can be offered to non-BMP adopters to increase their involvement?
- If the results do show positive con-

nections, will State and Federal governments give BMP more formal recognition?

- On the other hand, if the evaluation shows that BMP has not been a significant contributor to achieving environmental outcomes, what alternative investments should CRDC make to continue the industry's good performance?

REVIEW OF BIOTECHNOLOGY RESEARCH

CRDC will also be reviewing biotechnology research in early 2004, to determine whether we are investing in the right areas and maintaining our effort relative to the rest of the world. It will also help us to identify any areas where we should be refocusing priorities or funding further research when the drought lifts and CRDC's income returns to normal levels.

We have engaged three consultants of international repute to conduct the review. Between them, they bring an immense

range of skills and knowledge covering the cotton cycle from field to fabric.

- Dr Thea Wilkins, Professor of Agronomy and Range Science at the University of California, Davis, has an extensive background in applications in agricultural biotechnology for improving agronomically important traits.

- Rob Jarvis is Regional Director of The Cotton Company of Zimbabwe and has more than 30 years of involvement in the Zimbabwean cotton industry — ranging from cotton breeding and agronomy to extension and training, seed multiplication, seed processing and marketing, credit and input supply and ginning and marketing.

- Dr Lloyd May is Assistant Professor, Cotton Genetics Crop and Soil Sciences (Coastal), University of Georgia. His research program focuses on producer, yarn, and textile manufacturer needs in the global economy.

The consultants arrive in Australia on January 25. During their 13-day review they will meet with researchers, visit farms and processing and research facilities in the Narrabri district and southern Queensland. If you would like to attend a seminar in Narrabri with the consultants, please contact CRDC Program Coordinator, Jodi McLean, on (02) 6792 4088 or jodi@crdc.com.au.

Decision support for water allocation

The recent round of water reforms in NSW catchments demonstrated the need for better estimates of the economic and environmental effects of changes in water allocation policies, including unregulated surface water systems and the groundwater system.



Greg Kauter.

There is a great need for decision support tools that provide this type of information and are accessible to and understood by catchment decision-making communities.

A CRDC funded project, 'Development of Decision Support Systems for the Gwydir and Namoi valleys', run by the Australian National University in collaboration with NSW Agriculture, is focused on developing this capacity in these two catchments. The decision support tools being developed will be able to show economic impacts on irrigators in different regions across the catchments, as well as changes in the nature of flows at different points in the river system.

The types of policy changes that can be considered will include 'commence and cease' to pump thresholds, carryover provisions and allocations. NSW Agriculture is developing representative farm models for both of the catchments that will be incorporated in the system. The NSW Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Natural Resources (DIPNR) is collaborating on the project, providing access to data sets and feedback on models and project directions.

The project is overseen by a project Steering Committee comprising several irrigators and a representative of Tamworth City Council, as well as staff from regional and head offices of DIPNR, NSW Agriculture and CRDC. Researchers have also been in the field talking to individual irrigators about the decisions that they make on farm and other water management related issues irrigators feel are important to their catchments. Delivery and training on use of the two decision support tools should take place during 2005.

If you would like more information on the project, contact researcher, Rebecca

Letcher, on 02 6125 8132, rebecca.letcher@anu.edu.au; or CRDC Program Coordinator, Helen Dugdale, on 02 6792 4088, helen@crdc.com.au.

CSD AGRONOMIST JOINS CRDC

Greg Kauter, formerly a key member of the Cotton Seed Distributors extension and development team, joined CRDC as Research Program Manager in November, replacing Guy Roth.

Greg is a graduate in Agricultural Economics and Rural Science in Cotton Production from the University of New England and has spent his entire career in the cotton industry in the Namoi, Gwydir and Macintyre valleys.

For 10 years, he worked as a self-employed consultant in the Border Rivers region, based at Goondiwindi. Prior to joining CSD three years ago, he specialised in integrated pest management, under contract to the Queensland Department of Primary Industry and the Cotton CRC.

Greg is a former president of the Cotton Consultants Association, and represented the Association on the Transgenic and Insect Management Strategy Committee (TIMS).

Greg's arrival at CRDC, and the particular set of skills he brings, has meant some rearrangement of responsibilities for program management staff at the Corporation, with details still being finalised.

FIELD TO FABRIC TRIALS BEGIN

CRDC is developing an International Field to Fabric Initiative for Australian cotton quality. The first component of this is a "Focus on Quality" program aimed at improving Australia's premium quality market position while attempting to better quantify climatic and management effects on fibre quality.

The field component will involve cooperating growers adopting 'best bet' agronomic management options that seek to optimise fibre quality. Five trial sites have been established this season and each will concentrate on two or three elite CSIRO Bollgard II cultivars that are candidate varieties for 2004 and beyond.

Grower and processor participation in this program ensures the whole Australian cotton industry will have access to improved information on how they can continue to supply the world's best quality cotton.

If you have any further questions regarding this program, please contact CRDC Research Program Manager, Greg Kauter, on 02 6792 4088 or greg@crdc.com.au.